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Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2301 (2016), by which the Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) until 15 November 2017 and requested me to report to the Council by 1 October 2016 and every four months thereafter. The report provides an update on major developments in the Central African Republic and the implementation of the mandate of MINUSCA since the issuance of my previous report (S/2017/94) on 1 February 2017.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. The period under review was marked by uneven progress in the political process. Intensified clashes between armed groups in central and eastern prefectures marred peace and recovery efforts, causing a deterioration of the humanitarian situation. In contrast, a period of sustained calm in Bangui created the conditions for key institutions to address the multiple stabilization and recovery challenges. The presence of armed groups was also successfully reduced in Bambari thanks to the robust posture of MINUSCA, enabling initial steps to restore State authority and basic services in the country's second most important town. This created an environment in which all of the 14 main armed groups participated, for the first time since the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, in 2015, in a dialogue with the Government at the fourth meeting of the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation. Meanwhile, while progress was made towards establishing constitutionally mandated institutions, political competition increased, in particular between the executive and legislative branches of government. Some progress was recorded through the initial disbursement of funds committed at the Brussels Conference for the Central African Republic, held on 17 November 2016, but more will be required to deliver highly anticipated peace dividends to the population and catalyse the implementation of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan.

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3. Intense fighting continued among ex-Séléka groups over control of lucrative swathes of territory in the central and eastern prefectures. The violence essentially pitted the Unité pour la paix en centrafrique (UPC) against a coalition led by the Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC), uniting some ex-Séléka factions and self-defence groups loosely referred to as anti-balaka. The continued conflict between the FPRC coalition and UPC led to repeated attacks on the Fulani population over its perceived affiliation with UPC. The attacks are also driven by attempts to seize their resources (cattle, in particular). Anti-balaka aligned with the FPRC coalition also targeted Muslim communities in the south and east. This pattern of violence coincides with an increase in cattle migrating into the eastern Central African Republic, generating friction between local farmers and herders and Fulani herders or armed militia, causing animosity towards the Muslim community. In this environment, the targeted killing of Muslims in Bangassou on 13 and 14 May sparked reprisals in Bria from ex-Séléka members against anti-Balaka elements of the FPRC coalition, demonstrating the fractured and opportunistic nature of the FPRC coalition, as well as the risk that armed elements may be easily manipulated by spoilers acting for self-serving reasons.

4. In a context of continued violence, the Government convened the fourth Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation on 20 and 21 April. Following robust action by MINUSCA in February, FPRC and Maxime Mokom's anti-balaka group decided to designate representatives to the Committee, with the result that all 14 main armed groups attended the meeting. During the proceedings, the President, Faustin Archange Touadera, called for an immediate ceasefire and a broad dialogue under his auspices on political issues and confirmed that he had accepted the offer of the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation to support this dialogue.

5. Several initiatives to support the peace process continued, including the African Initiative, led by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, with the support of Angola, Chad and the Republic of the Congo. For its part, the Community of Sant'Egidio convened closed-door sessions with representatives of some of the armed groups in February and March in support of peace. In this context, many members of the National Assembly and civil society representatives took public stands against amnesty for individuals who have committed serious crimes and human rights violations. On 13 April, the President of the National Assembly, Karim Meckassoua, announced that the Assembly would launch its own peace initiative, which he later clarified would be in support of the Government's efforts.

6. President Touadera marked one year in office on 30 March with an address to the nation that highlighted his Government's progress, including the establishment of six institutions required by the Constitution such as the Constitutional Court, progress towards operationalizing the Special Criminal Court, and the continued deployment of civil servants to the prefectures. The President visited Bossangoa and Obo, and Bambari twice, first in March with the Vice-President of the World Bank for Africa and again in April with the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie. The President of the United Nations General Assembly visited Bangui on 10 and 11 May to express his support for peacekeeping and the country's recovery efforts.

7. The National Assembly held its second extraordinary session from 27 January to 6 February during which it adopted legislation on intellectual property and the postal system. The first ordinary session of 2017, held from 1 March to 31 May, elected a new bureau of the Assembly on 9 March and adopted laws creating the National Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Commission and establishing

the new Military Justice Code, and ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

8. To foster greater collaboration and coordination with international partners on economic recovery and development, humanitarian response, and key political and governance reforms, the Government established structures to operationalize the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan and the Framework for Mutual Engagement between the Central African Government and the international community On 22 March, the President convened the first meeting of the advisory board, the highest-level forum within this architecture and the venue for discussions between the Government and international partners on strategic issues related to peace, stability, human security and recovery.

B. Security situation

9. In contrast to the relative calm in Bangui, armed group violence remained high across the country, especially in Haute-Kotto, Moomou, Ouaka, Ouham and Ouham-Pendé prefectures, driven by competition over seasonal livestock migration and efforts to control resource-rich territory.

10. Hostilities rose sharply between the FPRC coalition and UPC in the centre and eastern prefectures during February and March, but decreased in intensity in April with many FPRC coalition fighters returning to their original positions. With the intention of capturing Bambari and expelling UPC leader Ali Darassa, the FPRC coalition captured various UPC positions north of Bambari in February. On 11 February, following repeated warnings by MINUSCA that any further advance towards Ippy (80 km north-east of Bambari, Ouaka prefecture) would be considered a clear threat to civilians, a MINUSCA armed helicopter engaged a column of approximately 300 members of the FPRC coalition 12 km east of Ippy after they crossed the line stipulated by MINUSCA. Around this time, the former Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique chief of staff and leader of FPRC coalition operations in Bria, Joseph Zoundeiko, was reportedly killed in circumstances that remain unknown. MINUSCA reinforced its position in Ippy to prevent further movement towards Bambari. On 21 February, alleged FPRC coalition elements fired upon MINUSCA between Ippy and Bambari, wounding four peacekeepers.

11. As part of MINUSCA's robust efforts to advance its mandated strategic objective and protect civilians in and around Bambari, and in close coordination with the Government, MINUSCA pressed the armed group leaders to leave Bambari and subsequently launched "Operation Bekpa" to stabilize the town and enable the gradual restoration of State authority. On 22 February, Ali Darassa and some UPC elements withdrew from Bambari. Anti-balaka leaders followed suit shortly thereafter. On 26 February, MINUSCA again used its armed helicopters to engage FPRC coalition fighters as they attempted to infiltrate Bambari in violation of the previously communicated line. MINUSCA subsequently detained Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) political leader Idriss El Bachar and FPRC political leader Yaya Idriss, and transferred both to national judicial authorities in Bangui.

12. Security in Bambari was bolstered by a reinforced MINUSCA presence and through the deployment of national security forces. However, armed group elements remain in Bambari, though they are not displaying weapons or military attire. The FPRC coalition continued to attempt to control the major routes around Bambari and pursued UPC as it moved east, attacking Bakouma (110 km north of Bangassou, Mboumou prefecture) on 20 March and gaining control of the Nzako mining site

(45 km north of Bakouma) on 21 March. Reports indicate that anti-balaka targeted primarily Muslims in Bakouma, killing some 16 persons, while the FPRC attack on Nzacko left two dead. Tensions also mounted between the FPRC coalition and the Fulani population in and around Bria, Haute-Kotto prefecture. On 15 February, UPC-affiliated Fulani armed men torched Makili village 60 km south of Bria. On 9 March, an armed Fulani group attacked Grao (70 km south-east of Bria), resulting in IDP movement towards Bria.

13. Self-defence groups, loosely referred to as anti-balaka, in loose association with the FPRC coalition increased attacks against UPC and ethnic Fulanis. During the seizure of Bakouma, on 20 March, anti-balaka elements systematically attacked Fulani civilians. On 24 March, MINUSCA repelled an anti-balaka attack on the Fulani neighbourhood of Gobolo in Bria, detaining 11 anti-balaka elements, two of whom were wounded; the other nine were transferred to national custody in Bangui. On 11 April, MINUSCA seized a large cache of weapons and ammunition allegedly destined for anti-balaka in Bangassou. On 8 May, anti-balaka ambushed a MINUSCA convoy 20 km east of Bangassou, Mbomou prefecture, killing five peacekeepers, and injuring ten, making this the deadliest attack against MINUSCA. On 9 May, in Alindao, Basse-Kotto prefecture, anti-balaka clashed with UPC causing an estimated 100 casualties, which led MINUSCA to deploy peacekeepers to the area to protect some 14,000 displaced persons.

14. On 13 May, heavily armed anti-balaka launched an offensive against MINUSCA in Bangassou, followed by attacks on the predominantly Muslim Tokoyo neighbourhood. One peacekeeper was killed and one injured during the effort to repel the offensive. Anti-balaka destroyed the access bridges to Bangassou, took control of water points, and displaced some 2,500 persons who took refuge in the cathedral, the mosque and the hospital. An estimated 7,200 persons remain displaced in the town while some 2,750 have fled to the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo. At least 115 persons were killed and 64 injured. MINUSCA reinforced its deployments in the area to stabilize the situation, including by deploying additional peacekeepers and making use of its attack helicopters and escorting some 1,000 Muslims to safety at the cathedral. Following the violence in Bangassou, clashes broke out in Bria on 16 May between anti-Balaka and armed elements from the Arab community, currently led by Ahmat Issa, loosely affiliated with the FPRC-led coalition. The clashes, which lasted for several days, left at least 49 dead and 35 injured and caused the displacement of some 38,267 people.

15. Kaga Bandoro remained relatively calm, yet the number of security incidents remained high, and ex-Séléka and anti-balaka continued to extort money from and threaten some 9,000 internally displaced persons living around the MINUSCA camp, preventing their return or relocation to another displaced persons camp in Kaga Bandoro, currently sheltering 4,050 individuals after 6,700 reportedly returned to their residences.

16. In the absence of State authority in the central and eastern prefectures, FPRC and MPC are increasingly establishing parallel administration structures. Armed elements purport to enforce order by illegally detaining and sentencing persons suspected of committing crimes and extorting payments from them. FPRC in Ndélé and Birao, and FPRC/MPC in Kaga Bandoro, occupy existing gendarmerie buildings, appearing armed and in uniform, effecting illegal detentions and handing down arbitrary sentences for alleged crimes. In Nzako, Mbomou prefecture, FPRC elements oversee the activities of gendarmerie, police, custom services and mining sites. FPRC recently provided fuel and medicine to Ndélé prefectural hospital, threatening to take over the administration of the hospital if the State would not address capacity gaps. In Vakaga prefecture, FPRC increased its presence along the

borders with Chad and the Sudan to control cross-border movements of persons and goods.

17. In south-east Mbomou and Haut-Mbomou prefectures, security was affected by criminal activities attributed to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the LRA dissident Doctor Achaye, Sudanese poachers and rogue UPC elements. Along the Zemio-Obo axis, unidentified armed elements killed two civilians on 31 January and attacked a truck contracted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 110 km west of Obo on 10 February. On 17 February, presumed LRA elements looted a town on the Dembia-Djema axis and temporarily abducted five men. On 30 March, some 40 presumed LRA elements unsuccessfully attempted to halt a MINUSCA logistics convoy 40 km east of Rafaï. In this context, the Uganda People's Defence Forces deployed in the Central African Republic as part of the African Union Regional Task Force formally handed over security to the Central African authorities in a disengagement ceremony in Obo on 18 May, while the United States forces supporting Task Force in the Central African Republic terminated their operations on 25 April. On 12 May, the African Union Peace and Security Council requested the Security Council to take disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army into account in the mandate of MINUSCA.

18. In the north-west, the security situation was characterized by the efforts of armed groups to control livestock. There is information about recriminations among members of the National Assembly over allegations of support to local anti-Balaka groups. MPC/Revolution et Justice (RJ) attempted to expand its area of influence across Ouham and Ouham Pendé prefectures to the border with Cameroon, generating conflict with anti-balaka. Retour, réclamation et réhabilitation (3R) and anti-balaka clashed over the livestock trade along the Cameroon border in Ouham Pendé prefecture. On 28 January, anti-balaka reportedly ambushed a convoy of Fulani traders escorted by 3R near Koui, Ouham-Pendé, killing 12 individuals. On 2 February, 3R clashed with anti-balaka in Bocaranga, leaving two civilians and seven 3R elements wounded, one anti-balaka dead and several thousand civilians fleeing the area. During the incident, anti-balaka elements opened fire on MINUSCA, prompting the peacekeepers to return fire. In March, MINUSCA established a buffer zone to halt clashes between anti-balaka and MPC in Bozoum and Gouzé, Ouham-Pendé prefecture.

19. The security situation remained relatively calm in Bangui. On 7 February, MINUSCA supported an operation led by national security forces to arrest Youssouf Malinga (alias "Big Man"), a member of a self-defence group. During the operation, Malinga's bodyguards responded to the attempted arrest by firing at the national security forces. In the ensuing exchange of fire, Malinga and one of his men were killed, in addition to two civilians, one of whom was a child. In a series of reprisal attacks, Malinga's men targeted civilians and religious buildings in the area, including by hurling a grenade into a crowd. In total, 11 people were killed and 18 injured.

20. On 9 March, a MINUSCA police officer in civilian attire was assaulted by suspected criminals in the third district of Bangui and died from his wounds. A national investigation, supported by MINUSCA, was opened into the incident.

C. Reconciliation

21. The first pillar of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan is aimed at supporting peace, security and reconciliation as essential underpinnings to recovery and normalization. In this regard, a network of local peace and reconciliation committees will be created at the local, regional and national levels. Of the 16 local

peace committees, two have been established with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, national authorities have yet to take full ownership of these initiatives. Following the departure of UPC from Bambari, the local peace committee was reconstituted. It organized community awareness-raising campaigns, reopened the central market and provided a platform for farmers and herders to resolve their differeaces, free from control by armed groups.

22. The one-year anniversary of the non-aggression pact between the predominantly Muslim PK5 district and the Christian neighbourhood of Boeing in Bangui was celebrated on 11 February. Community leaders articulated a strategy for ensuring the peaceful return of displaced Muslim families to the fifth district of Bangui and established a committee to implement the strategy. Leaders also held dialogues on freedom of movement, trade and peaceful coexistence.

III. Progress in implementing resolution 2301 (2016)

23. In line with its revised mission concept, MINUSCA's integrated mandate implementation approach focused on robust efforts to protect civilians in the light of the persistent clashes, while simultaneously facilitating dialogue with armed groups to persuade them to cease hostilities and honour their commitment to engage in the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process. Through Operation Bekpa, MINUSCA and partners are focusing efforts in and around Bambari to implement an "armed group-free city" initiative and support the Government to advance restoring State authority, including by coordinating efforts with the United Nations country team and international partners.

24. MINUSCA continued strengthening mobility and responsiveness, including in the context of Operation Bekpa through establishing an ad hoc joint task force for Bambari. In an environment of inaccessible roads and destroyed bridges, the combined use of transport and attack helicopters allowed the projection of forces from Bangui and the adoption of a robust and dynamic posture. For example, in March, a platoon was rapidly airlifted from Bangui to protect civilians under threat in Bakouma, while robust patrols and mobile deployments were decisive in preventing armed groups from entering Bambari. In the light of emerging new hotspots in the south-east, MINUSCA continued to adjust its force posture by redeploying troops in a flexible manner, but the situation is further compounded by increased fighting among armed groups, which includes the targeting of MINUSCA, and the departure of the Uganda People's Defence Forces. Efforts are also focused on assessing the broader military needs, including additional deployments within the authorized troop ceiling.

25. MINUSCA strengthened its strategic use of communications in support of the mandate and increased its outreach activities, including through the MINUSCA radio station, Guira FM. It held 73 public information events across the country, involving more than 85,000 people, to promote peaceful coexistence. This was particularly important in Bambari to explain the redeployment of State authority and the impartiality of the Mission in the light of accusations of bias.

A. Immediate priorities

Protection of civilians

26. Efforts to continually adjust deployments enabled MINUSCA to enhance its response time to early warnings and protection flashpoints. Likewise, increasing

community-level engagement in the design and implementation of community protection plans allowed MINUSCA to enhance its protection of civilians' efforts.

27. Violence associated with seasonal migration was characterized by cattle rustling and reprisals involving anti-balaka militias and armed groups. The Government's operational plan to reduce violence associated with seasonal migration remains largely unimplemented owing to funding shortages. The government institutions and subregional mechanisms that regulated the seasonal migration prior to the crisis are no longer functioning, resulting in cycles of violence and depriving Central Africans of seasonal pastoralist income. In this context, MINUSCA continued to conduct long-range patrols along migratory corridors, while local committees are pursuing solutions at the community level.

28. Some 21 MINUSCA joint protection teams were deployed to investigate armed group violence against civilians in different prefectures. These integrated teams documented abuses of human rights and gathered information to enhance the ability of MINUSCA to prevent and respond to violence. Through the United Nations Mine Action Service, MINUSCA disposed of 9,598 ammunition and explosive devices in populated areas and provided risk education to 74,710 beneficiaries.

Promoting and protecting human rights (including women and children)

29. MINUSCA documented 492 human rights violations or abuses or violations of international humanitarian law committed against 834 victims, comprising 442 men, 103 women, 172 children (58 boys, 56 girls and 58 unidentified minors), and another 117 unidentified victims. These incidents comprised arbitrary killings, violations of physical integrity, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions and abductions. The following armed groups were responsible for 326 human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law: ex-Séléka factions (202), anti-balaka (67), LRA (38), MPC/RJ (7), 3R (7), Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (4), and the Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement (UFDR) (1). Nearly half of these abuses occurred in the context of the conflict between the FPRC coalition and UPC. National security forces were responsible for 165 violations, including 153 cases of arbitrary detention, of which 104 were attributed to the national gendarmerie and 49 to national police.

30. The human rights mapping report on serious violations and abuses of international human rights law and humanitarian law committed from 2003 to 2015 is slated to be launched on 30 May. The report will contribute to combating impunity by supporting the prosecutorial strategy of the Special Criminal Court and the development of transitional justice mechanisms.

31. The United Nations system continued to apply the United Nations human rights due diligence policy. Of the 35 requests for support by non-United Nations security forces (military, gendarmerie and police), 29 were approved, with risk mitigation measures recommended when appropriate.

32. MINUSCA conducted 19 workshops to raise awareness on human rights, including conflict-related sexual violence and transitional justice, for 796 individuals (440 men and 356 women), local authorities, civil society and journalists. MINUSCA also conducted 29 outreach campaigns on human rights-related issues, in which 2,625 people (1,267 women and 1,358 men) participated.

Conflict-related sexual violence

33. MINUSCA received reports of 27 conflict-related sexual violence incidents affecting 20 women and 12 girls. Of the cases, 25 involved rape and 2 sexual

assault. The following armed groups were allegedly responsible: ex-Seleka factions (13), the RJ/MPC coalition (5), LRA (6), anti-balaka (2) and UFDR (1).

Children and armed conflict

34. Grave violations and abuses committed against children by armed groups continued to be verified by the country task force on monitoring and reporting. Hostilities between the FPRC-led coalition and UPC continued to take a toll on children. A total of 14 children (of whom 6 were girls) were killed; 13 children sustained injuries; 12 girls were raped; and 6 children were abducted. A total of 16 children were recruited or joined armed groups, while two hospitals and four schools were occupied and looted. Perpetrators of these grave child rights violations included the FPRC coalition, UPC, anti-balaka, RJ, LRA and unidentified armed individuals.

35. In order to enhance the monitoring of grave child rights violations and the protection of children, 257 MINUSCA peacekeepers were trained on child rights and child protection. The training was extended to 432 external partners, including local communities, non-governmental organizations and national defence and national security forces.

36. UNICEF provided integration support to 420 children released from armed groups, while 239 children (of whom 55 were girls) were separated from anti-balaka groups. As part of efforts to end the association of children with armed groups, MINUSCA in collaboration with local partners organized a week-long campaign in February to sensitize armed groups, community members and authorities in five localities on the impact of armed conflict on children.

B. Sustainably reducing the presence of, and the threat posed by, armed groups

37. MINUSCA continues to implement a comprehensive strategy aimed at achieving the strategic objective of sustainably reducing the threat and presence of armed groups. This strategy is informed by the primacy of the political process.

Support for reconciliation and the extension of State authority

38. MINUSCA used its good offices to assist the Government in advancing reconciliation, including by encouraging it to rapidly mobilize and deploy donor funding to deliver essential services to the population and generate popular trust in the Government's commitment to equitable development. The United Nations supported local dialogue among communities and provided short-term employment, vocational training and awareness-raising sessions for 18,002 youth at risk, members of vulnerable groups and displaced persons. MINUSCA facilitated 30 trips by parliamentarians to consult their constituents on the work of the legislature.

39. MINUSCA supported the deployment of 410 civil servants countrywide, primarily from the Ministry of Education. MINUSCA and UNDP supported the Ministry of Interior in developing a guide to promote understanding of concepts of good governance among civil servants in the regions. MINUSCA and UNDP, with financial support from the Peacebuilding Fund, mapped the actual deployment of government personnel and the conditions required to ensure that they are operational.

40. Redeploying State security, judicial, social service and administrative authorities to Bambari was prioritized to demonstrate the ability of State institutions to function properly to the benefit of the populations when armed conflict is

restrained. Some 90 gendarmes and police officers have deployed to Bambari after being trained by MINUSCA and reviewed under the United Nations human rights due diligence policy, and are working in tandem with MINUSCA uniformed personnel. MINUSCA also supported the return of the local Prosecutor to Bambari.

Support for disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation

41. MINUSCA facilitated the organization of the fourth meeting of the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation. A significant outcome of the meeting was the agreement by all armed groups to participate in a pilot disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation/integration project, targeting 560 participants. However, FPRC declined to validate the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme pending the fulfilment of several preconditions, including the signature of a political agreement. The World Bank committed $30 out of the $45 million required for the reintegration component of the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme.

42. In the absence of a political agreement and a national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme, community violence reduction and pre-disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation continued to play a vital role. A total of 4,324 ex-combatants, including 737 women, are participating in pre-disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programmes in eight locations through cash-for-work programmes, as a transitional means to longer-term income generating projects, as well as through training to support the sustainable reinsertion of ex-combatants.

43. The community violence reduction project in Ouham-Pendé prefecture, implemented with the International Organization for Migration, engaged 6,723 beneficiaries, of whom 1,623 are women, in cash-for-work jobs and intercommunal dialogue. In Bangui, through the community violence reduction projects launched with the United Nations Office for Project Services, 543 beneficiaries, of whom 40 are women, completed vocational training and 777 beneficiaries, of whom 47 are women, are participating in agro-pastoral training conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization. Community violence reduction beneficiaries also included youth at risk through labour-intensive income-generating programmes.

44. The destruction of 169 items of unexploded ordnance and 840 rounds of small arms ammunition and the safe storage of weapons collected through the pre-disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process contributed to the removal of weapons and ammunition from circulation and their potential use by armed groups.

Support for security sector reform

45. Significant progress was achieved in designing an enabling strategic framework for security sector reform, although this sector continues to suffer from insufficient financing. The National Security Policy was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 2 February. The elements contained in the policy were further articulated in the 2017-2022 National security sector reform Strategy, adopted by the Strategic Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and Security Sector Reform and National Reconciliation on 10 March. The strategy is focused on three key areas: strengthening security sector capacity; reinforcing security of persons, goods and restoration of State authority; and fostering good governance and the rule of law. On 21 March, the Ministry of Defence launched the development of a national defence policy, with support from the European Union Military Training Mission in the Central African Republic.

46. The European Union Military Training Mission completed the training of the first battalion of national defence forces (Forces armées centrafricaines) and started training the second battalion in May, while the Central African authorities are still considering their deployment. The issue of equipment, sustainment and logistical support for this trained battalion remains unresolved. MINUSCA conducted training-of-trainers sessions for 120 military personnel, including 24 officers, on information and communication sciences and battalion administration. MINUSCA rehabilitated and furnished Camp Leclerc training centre in Bouar and is scheduled to hand it over to the national authorities in May.

47. MINUSCA continued to support weapons and ammunition management efforts; completed the training of 17 members of the security forces and implemented three infrastructure projects, including the construction of one armoury in Bangui and the deployment of one armoury container in Bambari. Meanwhile, the establishment of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons was made official on 14 February through a decree, drafted with support from MINUSCA.

48. The recruitment process for 250 police officers and 250 gendarmes conducted by national authorities continued to advance with MINUSCA support. Of 13,649 applications received from all 16 prefectures, 10,370 (of which 28 per cent were from women) were assessed to meet the minimum requirements by a mixed oversight committee comprising government, UNDP and MINUSCA representatives. The committee prepared the selection tests, to ensure balanced geographical and gender representation. The written and physical selection tests were completed by 27 May. MINUSCA is coordinating with the Peacebuilding Fund and UNDP to ensure the coverage of the running costs of the police and gendarmerie academies, while the Government has committed to include the payroll of the 500 new officers in the national budget for 2018. On 20 May, MINUSCA supported the launch of the written examination for the recruitment of the gendarmes and police officers in all the prefectures of the country, except for Haute-Kotto and Mbomou prefectures, where the tests were postponed owing to security concerns.

Support for the rule of law and efforts to combat impunity, including through the operationalization of the Special Criminal Court

49. Efforts to combat impunity continued to advance through the significant progress made in operationalizing the Special Criminal Court, beginning with its investigation and prosecution capacity. Three out of a total of six international magistrates have been appointed, including the Special Prosecutor and two female investigating judges. All five national magistrates were also appointed, while the national Chief Registrar has yet to be selected. While the Special Prosecutor is deployed on 25 May, investigation and prosecution can only begin after the Central African authorities complete the selection of judicial police officers to form a team of investigators. Full funding for the Court's first 14 months has been secured, but a significant gap remains with regard to the full five years of its initial duration. Following the adoption of the Military Justice Code by the National Assembly on 7 March, MINUSCA is working with the Central African authorities to clarify the provisions of the code regarding the need to maintain the exclusive jurisdiction of the Special Criminal Court on crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

50. MINUSCA continued its efforts to support the rule of law. The Mission apprehended 92 alleged perpetrators, using urgent temporary measures in 57 cases. Owing to insecurity and the lack of functional courts and prisons outside the capital, MINUSCA temporarily detained and supported the transfer to Bangui, at the request of the Government, of 33 of those apprehended. MINUSCA continued to provide advice to investigations into some 17 people allegedly involved in serious crimes,

most notably against 13 FPRC coalition members indicted in March 2017 on counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

51. The High Judicial Council continued to rotate judicial personnel, with magistrates taking up new posts in February and March. A total of 19 new magistrates were named throughout the country and 10 took up their posts by early March in Bangui. Housing and payment of salary for magistrates continue to undermine their sustainable redeployment beyond Bangui.

52. Challenges afflicting the justice system are having a significant impact on overcrowding in prisons. The Ngaragba central prison and its annex at Camp de Roux stand at 178 per cent and 116 per cent, respectively, of their capacity. In the past six months, MINUSCA has continued to engage the Prosecutor at the appeals court in Bangui to develop strategies to accelerate the processing of pending cases, including limiting incarceration in cases of minor infractions to time served in pretrial detention. Magistrates unable to return to some regions owing to insecurity were temporarily assigned to Bangui in April to help reduce the backlog of cases, thereby enabling weekly court sessions to be doubled, from three to six.

53. To prevent further overcrowding in Bangui, MINUSCA financed the reconstruction of three detention facilities in Bangassou, Kaga Bandoro and Mbaiki through quick-impact projects. As part of MINUSCA's support to the national authorities to demilitarize prisons, it completed an initial assessment of the needs in this area and for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of prisoners. Overcrowding, poor conditions and a general lack of prisoner activity have contributed to insecurity within prisons. In March, with support from Canada and Sweden, 60 MINUSCA corrections officers participated in specialized prison intervention training to enhance the ability of MINUSCA ability to address prison insecurity.

Natural resources management

54. MINUSCA provided logistical and security support for national authorities during their field inspection and monitoring missions related to the Kimberley Process, with the aim of assessing the extent of armed group presence, improving security to enable the free movement of goods and persons, and restoring and extending State authority in the mining areas in the south-west of the country.

C. Coordination of international assistance and the Mutual Engagement Framework

55. The Government established mechanisms for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Mutual Engagement Framework and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. The three-tiered coordination structure comprises a high-level policy advisory board, a joint executive committee, and a technical level coordination forum for each pillar of the development strategy. The pillar on peace and security is co-chaired by the Presidency and the United Nations and has completed a mapping of projects and identified potential gaps in funding. Consultations are still under way for the co-presidency arrangements of the other two pillars, which has delayed their operationalization.

56. At the Brussels Conference in November 2016, donors pledged 2.2 billion to support the 2017-2021 National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. To date, donors have confirmed an estimated $2.23 billion, or 97 per cent, of the total pledges. The final amount, however, could be higher, as some donors have increased their pledges, while others that were not present in Brussels later decided to support

the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. Of all pledges committed, approximately 43 per cent were allocated to economic recovery and the productive sectors, 40 per cent to strengthening the social contract between the State and the population and 14 per cent to support peace, security and reconciliation, and 3 per cent to other issues. For 2017, expenditure to date on ongoing projects is $54.2 million (or 25.9 per cent) out of a projected $209.3 million for the first year.

IV. Humanitarian situation

57. The worsened violence over the past six months resulted in increased humanitarian needs, with multiple new hotspots emerging across the country, including in areas where there were already displaced populations. In April alone, more than 40,000 people were displaced as a result of fighting in the north-western and eastern parts of the country. One out of five Central Africans is currently displaced outside or inside the country, while armed violence is preventing them from returning home. The total number of internally displaced persons increased from 401,072 in February to 426,100 in March. This increase was predominantly due to new displacements recorded in Mbomou, Ouaka and Ouham-Pendé prefectures. During the same period, several displacement sites closed in Bangui with returns observed in the sub-prefecture of Bakala, Ouaka prefecture, and in Kaga Bandoro. Over 1,000 people fleeing violence crossed the border into Chad and Cameroon, which are hosting some 230,000 refugees. The number of refugees in neighbouring countries has increased slightly to 483,000 as at 30 April. Some 1,639 South Sudanese refugees relocated from Bambouti to Obo, Haut-Mbomou prefecture.

58. Some 2 million people — or approximately 50 per cent of the population — remain food insecure. Meanwhile, despite efforts to mobilize donors, including a high-level briefing with donors on humanitarian challenges held in Yaoundé on 15 March, humanitarian activities remain severely underfunded. As at 15 May the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017 had garnered only 16 per cent of the $399.5 million funding necessary.

59. Humanitarian actors also face insecurity, as they continue to be targeted indiscriminately. Some 31 per cent of attacks against non-governmental organizations recorded globally in 2016 took place in the Central African Republic, thereby making it the most dangerous place in the world for humanitarian actors.

60. While ongoing hostilities in the east have severely limited humanitarian access, other areas of concern include Koui in Ouham-Pendé prefecture in the west, which has been inaccessible since October 2016, and Ngaoundaye, where armed groups recently provoked the displacement of an additional 20,000 persons in early April, some of whom sought refuge in Chad. Accidental fire and torrential rains in April greatly damaged the camps for internally displaced persons in Batangafo, Ouham prefecture, and Kaga Bandoro, Nana Grébizi prefecture, causing deaths, injuries and loss of property.

V. Socioeconomic developments

61. Growth stood at 4.5 per cent in 2016, driven by forestry and agriculture. Subject to improved security, a portion of the $2.28 billion pledged to support the 2017-2021 National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan is expected to be used to inject money into the economy through public investment to address social needs.

62. Pursuant to the approval of a $120 million three-year extended credit facility, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde,

visited Bangui on 24 and 25 January and called upon the Government to raise domestic revenue, repay current debt, refrain from contracting new debt and improve public finance management.

VI. Deployment of the Mission

A. Military

63. As at 15 May, MINUSCA had deployed 10,471 military personnel (97.4 per cent of the authorized strength of 10,750), comprising 11 infantry battalions, a special forces company, a quick reaction force company, an unmanned aerial vehicle unit (deployed on 7 April 2017) and several enabling units, namely a military police unit, four engineering companies, a heavy transport company, three level II hospitals, a signal company and three helicopter units, including a combat helicopter unit. Women comprised 1.5 per cent of military personnel. Troop-contributing countries continued to improve the equipment of their respective contingents.

B. Police

64. As at 15 May, MINUSCA had deployed 1,845 police personnel (89 per cent of the authorized strength of 2,080), comprising 302 individual police officers (75 per cent of the authorized strength of 400, largely owing to the need for specialized recruitment profiles), as well as nine formed police units and two protection support units, comprising 1,543 personnel (92 per cent of the authorized strength of 1,680), including 103 women. A total of 81 individual police officers are deployed in 10 locations outside Bangui, while of the nine formed police units, three were in Bambari, Bouar and Kaga Bandoro. The remaining unit is expected to deploy in Bria in June.

C. Civilian personnel

65. As at 15 May, MINUSCA had deployed 1,329 civilian personnel, representing an incumbency rate of 77 per cent against a total of 1,724 authorized positions (790 international, 696 national and 238 United Nations Volunteer positions). Female staff members constitute 25 per cent of civilian personnel deployed and 22 per cent of personnel holding a senior position at the P-5 level or above. The recruitment and retention of female staff, including United Nations Volunteers, remains extremely challenging.

D. Status-of-forces agreement

66. Despite government efforts to address outstanding issues related to the status-of-forces agreement, there were serious breaches. On 2 February, the importation of four containers of flour for military contingents was blocked by customs for almost two months. The containers were released on 23 March, but the incident had already had negative consequences on the distribution of rations to MINUSCA peacekeepers. On 6 March, two containers of arms and ammunitions to support the deployment of a Jordanian formed police unit were seized and searched by local authorities in the absence of a United Nations representative. Although the incident was resolved, a firearm was missing when the containers were inventoried. On 14 March, two containers carrying plastic pipes were searched by customs officials in the absence of a United Nations representative.

67. The reimbursement to the United Nations of fuel taxes, which had been improperly imposed on MINUSCA in 2015 and 2016, was discussed at a meeting of a joint Government-MINUSCA working group on the implementation of the status-of-forces agreement held on 12 April 2017. Government representatives agreed that MINUSCA is exempt from fuel taxes pursuant to the agreement and affirmed that a procedure for reimbursing previously paid fuel taxes would be established. The Ministry of Finance confirmed that United Nations staff members are exempt from lease registration and related tax payments. Moreover, the practice of imposing taxes on MINUSCA personnel leaving the country with the residue of their pay and emoluments ceased.

VII. Safety and security of United Nations staff

68. The challenging security situation in the country is negatively impacting United Nations personnel, civilian and uniformed, national and international. Demonstrations and carjacking were recorded in Bangui and the outlying regions. In recent months, armed groups have begun issuing threats to kidnap both national and international staff in retaliation for the operations of the Mission. 134 security incidents affected 107 personnel of the United Nations security management system. In addition, 6 peacekeepers lost their lives as a result of attacks and 30 were seriously injured.

VIII. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

69. Between 1 February and 30 April 2017, 14 allegations of serious misconduct were reported to MINUSCA, including 5 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, representing a significant reduction in the number of new allegations reported, as compared with the same period a year ago. One of the new allegations relates to misconduct reported to have occurred in 2016 and four to incidents in 2017. In line with the MINUSCA sexual exploitation and abuse action plan, the Mission continued to enhance preventive efforts, including increasing the number of training of trainer sessions; better monitoring and oversight of training provided to all contingents; frequent risk assessments; increased sensitization by sexual exploitation and abuse focal points within military and police components; and paying particular attention to troops serving in remote areas and newly rotated contingents.

70. MINUSCA collaborated with United Nations agencies to improve its victims' assistance tracking tool and strengthen reporting, information sharing and coordinated responses with regard to the processing of sexual exploitation and abuse allegations. Consistent with my directive, MINUSCA appointed a victims rights advocate and will use its resources to provide, inter alia, psychosocial assistance and legal assistance to address criminal incidents or, where the alleged victim is a minor, security, shelter and temporary financial support to a victim or their family based on need.

IX. Financial aspects

71. The General Assembly, by its resolution 70/271, appropriated the amount of $920.7 million for the maintenance of MINUSCA for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. As at 15 May 2017, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for MINUSCA amounted to $52 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $1,679.2 million. Reimbursement of troop and formed police unit costs has been

made for the period up to 30 January 2017, while reimbursement of the cost of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 December 2016, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

X. Observations

72. Over recent months, the Central African Republic has oscillated between consolidating gains achieved since the election of President Touadera, primarily in Bangui, and a serious deterioration of the security situation in other parts of the country, including deadly attacks against United Nations peacekeepers. As relevant as many of the advances to date have been, the latest spate of violence that erupted in May in some towns in the east and centre of the country risks derailing the progress achieved over the last year and spreading with disastrous consequences, both for civilians and the country's stability. We must avoid the persistent violent conflict and the associated tensions setting the country yet again on a downward spiral. I remain personally committed to exploring all possible options to contributing to reversing this negative trend and assisting the country in consolidating peace.

73. The clashes between armed groups in particular FPRC and UPC and violence perpetrated by anti-balaka groups operating in the south-east are of grave concern. The attacks against civilians on account of their ethnicity or religion and against the peacekeepers deployed to protect them are unacceptable. I call upon all armed groups to immediately cease hostilities and demonstrate their commitment to peaceful dialogue. I reiterate my call on regional leaders and institutions to use their influence to bring an end to the violence.

74. MINUSCA has demonstrated that it stands ready to act robustly to protect civilians and defend its mandate. I commend the call of President Touadera for an open, inclusive and genuine dialogue with the armed groups, and welcome the recent participation of all 14 armed groups in the national consultative committee for the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme. I urge all groups and the Government to engage in this dialogue as a matter of urgency and to honour their commitment to pursue a political agreement vital to the success of the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation programme and longer-term security sector reform. It is essential that this dialogue be inclusive and build upon the recommendations of the Bangui Forum.

75. I welcome the acceptance by President Touadera of the offer of assistance by the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation, which has the potential, with strong regional and international support backed by a unified Security Council, to support a comprehensive peace agreement between the Government and all armed groups. I have expressed the full support of the United Nations for the African Initiative, and urge the African Union and the other members of the Initiative to quickly define and implement a road map to take this process forward. I wish to stress that time is of the essence. We have to work quickly in order to offer an alternative to violence to some armed groups and offer a short respite for the process to move forward. The onset of the rainy season should limit armed group movements. At the same time, I encourage the subregion to take concrete steps to address cross-border issues that foster insecurity in the Central African Republic and its neighbours, most notably illicit arms trafficking and seasonal migration. As the pastoralist season has peaked, subregional solutions to this sensitive political, economic and social issue are urgently required.

76. The capacity of the State remains extremely limited and State authority is only very gradually extending in areas where the security situation is relatively stable.

Progress is slow and not without tension between the executive and legislative branches as they adjust to their democratic roles. It is now incumbent on all national actors to make the most of the present engagement with the support of the international community, to work in an inclusive manner to accelerate efforts to advance reconciliation, consolidate the fragile gains and translate them into peace dividends, in particular beyond Bangui.

77. Further progress requires that Central Africans begin to see the dividends of peace. I urge national leaders to act swiftly and decisively to establish the capacity to mobilize, receive, manage and account for the generous donor funding pledged during the November 2016 Brussels conference. In doing so, a return to the corrupt practices and poor governance that triggered the crisis of recent years must be prevented. I urge donors to make funds available as quickly as possible, including for labour-intensive infrastructure projects that both gainfully employ young adults and weave the country together through a road network and social service systems. The impact of donor funding will be short-lived without the political commitment of those elected to serve the population and the resolve of all stakeholders to forfeit short-term gains for the long-term benefit of Central Africans countrywide. In this vein, I encourage the Government to use the Mutual Engagement Framework to obtain political support for, and demonstrate progress towards, agreed commitments.

78. The significant donor pledges demonstrated the determination of the international community to assist the Central Africans in this journey. I call upon all partners to take advantage of the presence of the peacekeeping operation in the country to prioritize and align responses, taking advantage of the security efforts of MINUSCA to inject development funding and quickly provide evidence of the benefits of stability, namely, employment, infrastructure and social services. The approach of the World Bank to working in fragile States such as the Central African Republic is a good example of such partnership with the United Nations.

79. I welcome the progress achieved towards the restoration of security and State authority in Bambari. The relative absence of armed groups in the town may be a source of cautious optimism, but we must not allow the town to be isolated in a sea of turmoil. This is why I urge the Government to prioritize the lasting redeployment of capable and accountable State authority, basic services and security in order to rebuild trust with the local population. The United Nations system in the country, together with its partners, will continue to support these efforts through an innovative whole-of-system approach. This will be buttressed by the continued readiness of MINUSCA to act decisively to ensure the protection of the people of Bambari.

80. The steps taken to develop a strategic framework on security sector reform are encouraging. While the adoption of key security sector reform documents signals the formal commitment of national authorities to establish professional, ethnically representative and regionally balanced national defence and security forces, I urge the Government to translate this vision into tangible actions. The launch of the recruitment of 500 new gendarmerie and police officers is a welcome development in this regard. I call on the Government to ensure that the composition of these new recruits is geographically representative and gender-balanced. I also welcome the progress in the training of the Central African armed forces by the European Union Training Mission, even although concerns remain that the lack of coherent operational and logistical support arrangements will hamper any future deployment. I urge the Government to allocate sufficient funding in its budget to sustain its security forces and call upon international partners to provide additional funding, equipment and logistical support.

81. I am encouraged to see steady progress towards the operationalization of the Special Criminal Court, which is expected to have jurisdiction over crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide. I call upon the national authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that the Special Prosecutor can immediately start investigations. I commend the mapping of serious violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights law, which will inform transitional justice mechanisms, as well as the work of the Special Prosecutor.

82. I am outraged by the continued attacks on peacekeepers and aid workers, both international and national. I strongly condemn the cowardly attack that killed 5 peacekeepers and wounded 10, making this the single deadliest attack against MINUSCA. The loss of a sixth peacekeeper in the subsequent attack on Bangassou is reprehensible. These attacks constitute serious crimes under international law, and I call for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

83. I am deeply concerned about the impact that the security situation is having on the humanitarian situation, which is further compounded by the persistent gap between humanitarian needs and resources. We need to stem the flow of humanitarian actors leaving the country because of lack of funding and insecurity. The continued attacks against aid workers who are helping the destitute must stop. I urge the international community to urgently contribute to the Humanitarian Response Plan to avoid a further deterioration of the situation.

84. I express my sincere gratitude to my Special Representative, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for his unflinching dedication to consolidating peace in the country. I pay tribute to the women and men of MINUSCA, the United Nations country team and to the troop- and police-contributing countries for their dedication to the cause of peace in a highly demanding and challenging environment. I am also grateful to my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, François Louncény Fall, for his role in the subregion in support of the Central African Republic. I thank the African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the European Union, the World Bank, international partners and non-governmental organizations for their continued efforts to contribute to peace and security in the Central African Republic.